

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Communicable Disease Control

Psittacosis (ornithosis, parrot fever)

What is psittacosis?

Psittacosis is an infectious disease usually transmitted to humans from birds in the parrot family, turkeys and pigeons.

Who gets psittacosis?

Since this disease is spread by birds in the parrot family, it is occasionally found in pet store workers and people who have recently purchased an infected bird. It may also be found in workers on turkey and duck farms and slaughterhouse workers who process turkeys.

How is psittacosis spread?

Psittacosis is usually spread by inhaling dust from dried droppings from bird cages and by handling infected birds in poultry processing plants. Human to human spread is rarely reported.

What are the symptoms of psittacosis?

The symptoms are fever, headache, chills and sometimes pneumonia.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period may range from four to 15 days but is usually 10 days.

Does past infection with psittacosis make a person immune?

Infection does not provide permanent immunity from this disease.

What is the treatment for psittacosis?

Antibiotics such as tetracycline are often prescribed.

What can be the effect of not being treated for psittacosis?

The disease may be severe, and result in a high death rate especially in untreated older people.

What can be done to prevent the spread of psittacosis?

If birds are kept as pets, clean the cage often so that fecal material does not accumulate, dry up and become airborne. Current laws require that members of the parrot family that are imported from foreign countries be kept in a bird quarantine station prior to sale. During the 30 day quarantine, they are given feed containing tetracycline to reduce the risk of infection. Illegally imported birds are more likely to transmit the disease.